WHIRRAKEE

March 2013 Vol. 34 No. 2

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Vice President	Richard Goonan	
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Minute Secretary	*position vacant*	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
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Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
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Garden Convenor/Secretary	*position vacant*	
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Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Vanessa Richardson	
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

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Vol. 34, No. 2, March 2013

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

CONTENT

Item	Contributor	Page
Short notices		3
January Observations in the backyard	Dale Little	3
Members February Observations	recorded by Rod Orr	3
Colour Photo section	various wonderful photographers	4-7
Thoughts about quandong regeneration	Peter Ellis	8
Conclusion on whipstick excursion and distillery	John Lindner	9
March excursion detail	John Lindner	10

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.

Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note

Summer is usually a quiet time in the bush, but Dale Little's observation about the absence of bees is especially interesting. Has anybody else noticed an unusually low number of bees? It is also fascinating that the size of spider webs could be increasing. What a keen eye! Hopefully, the small amount of rain at the end of February will help to revive dormant gardens and our bushland with all its large and small inhabitants. There is obviously still much to report, as shown by the members' February observations.

Front page photographer: Joy Clusker

Don't you love the symmetry of daisies? This Button Daisy, *Coronidium scorpioides* was photographed in early summer last year.

Short Notices

For all lovers of fungi…

Fungi play an integral role in ecosystems, yet little is known about them. Fungimap is a national non-profit organisation committed to the conservation of Australia's macrofungi. **Our seventh biennial conference is being held in Rawson, Victoria, in May 24-27.** Fungimap 7 is suitable for people with all levels of knowledge about fungi – from the absolute beginner to the mycologist.

Fungimap 7 includes one day of talks, two days of forays and workshops, and a full day foray to Tarra-Bulga national park. Workshops range from understanding, identifying and surveying fungi and making records, photos, and collections of them, as well as leading fungal activities and assessing them for threatened species status. Talks cover a range of topics, including managing bushland for fungi, mushroom classification, fungi's relationships with orchids and mammals, and Fungimap's work. A small number of student scholarships will be made available. For more information and to register for the conference (registration opens Feb 4), please see the Fungimap website www.rbg.vic.gov.au/fungimap or contact Blanche Higgins Fungimap Coordinator, Mondays and Tuesdays 03 92522374, e-mail: blanche.higgins@rbg.vic.gov.au

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January Observations in the backyard

by Dale Little

This summer, our back yard has not been as busy and productive as usual. In particular we have noticed the absence of bees and other insects. Our agapanthus border, always an attraction for bees, was bee free, as were the few native plants and the lemon tree. Our small but usually productive vegetable patch has struggled. The snow peas, beans, zucchini, broccoli, peppers and tomatoes have not yielded their usual bounty, and in fact most vegetables have now been pulled out and the area left to rest. There seemed little point in watering plants that were not producing.

The disappearance of bees across the world has been well documented. A quick Google search reveals how wide spread the problem is and the effect their disappearance will have on food crops. Pollution, pesticides, diseases and environmental changes are all seen as possible causes. Here in the central city area, my thoughts turn to the increasing development of "maintenance free" gardens with their green hedges and ground cover replacing the traditional flowering annuals of childhood gardens.

Recently I watched as a spider captured the only bee I had seen for a long time (see photo on page 4). Even the spider seems to be having trouble securing enough food as the area of its web has increased greatly, encroaching further and further along the clothes line. (Note to self: buy the Field Nats. Spider book rather than just thinking about doing it, so I can identify it)

Our only other recent visitor has been a praying mantis. It was resting under the covers of one of the chairs on the back veranda. Thinking we were being helpful we removed it to the garden. It was no sooner placed on a low-lying branch when the female blackbird from next door made a dive for it. My flapping arms deterred the bird. We then moved the mantis into the thick tangle of jasmine.

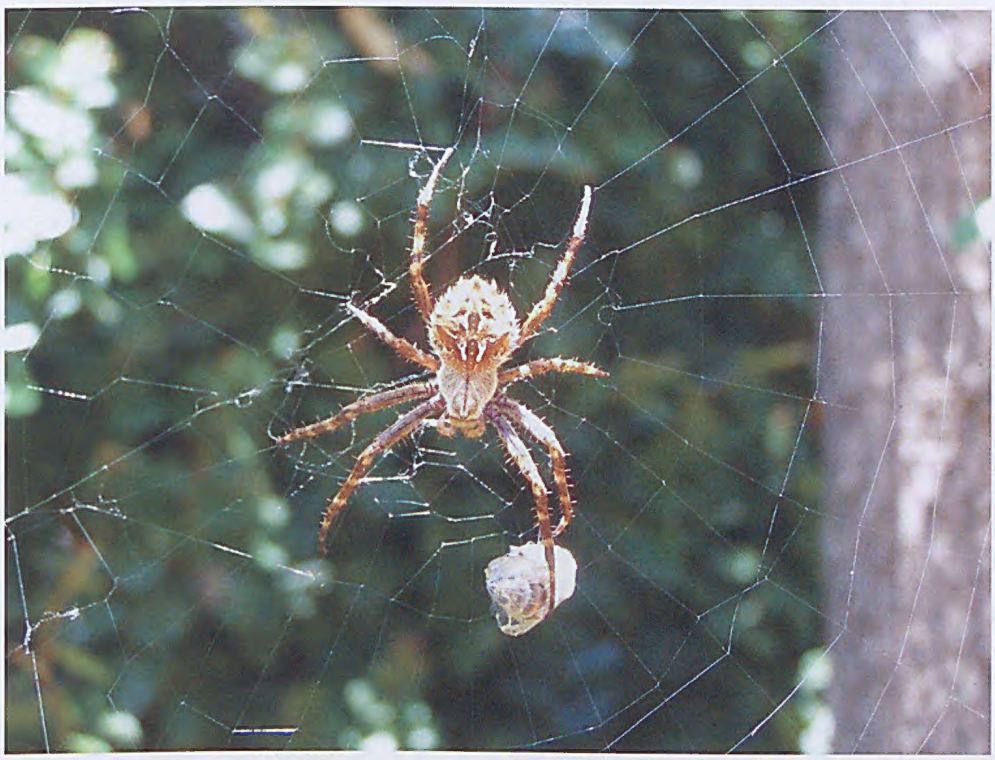
February Observations (some of these were noted at the first general meeting of the year)

Jan Orr

Kennington Reservoir February 1st-13th, 2013. The very dry weather conditions we have experienced over the past 3 months has meant that there has been an increased use of Kennington Reservoir water on the McIvor Rd. sports grounds. The water level in the lake is once again receding and its gloriously muddy bottom is coming into view. Waders and waterbirds love shallow water and wet mudflats so there is plenty to see on our morning walks.

Continued on page 8…

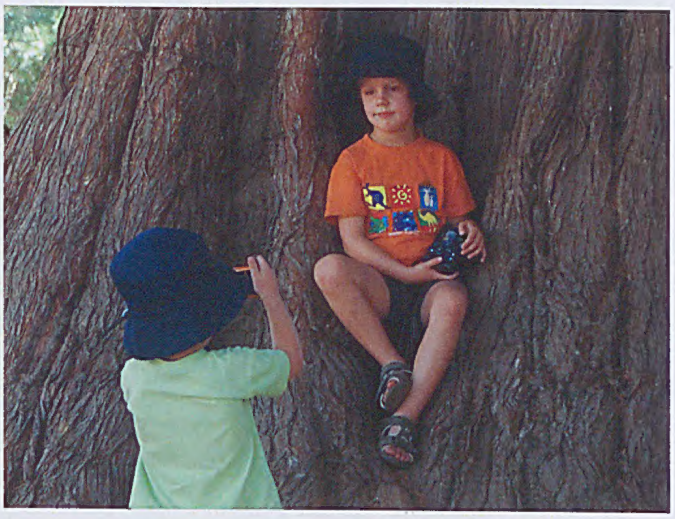
January Images



This spider captured what seemed to be the only bee in Dale Little's garden (see article on page 3)

Family Nature Club - Photography at No. 7 Park , Sunday, Feb 17. Leaders: Wendy Radford & John Bardsley. (Photos by Joy Clusker)

There is no end of subjects to photograph



Does anybody know what this is? (photo S.Wilkens)

Two lepidopterans at different stages of their life

Ogyris abrota (female) – the Dark Purple Azure.

Its larvae feed at night on one of several Mistletoe species including *Muellerina eucalyptoides* (the Creeping Mistletoe). (Photographer: Glenise Moors, ID: Rod Orr). See observations on page 3/8

← Its caterpillar is shown in the inset (image from Flying Colours by P. and M. Cougar 1992))

Joy found this Hawk moth caterpillar in the back yard. It was eating Ash tree leaves (Photographer: Joy Clusker)

This could be *Psilogramma* sp (?), the Privet Hawk-moth.

An adult Privet Hawk-moth is shown in the inset (image from Wikipedia)

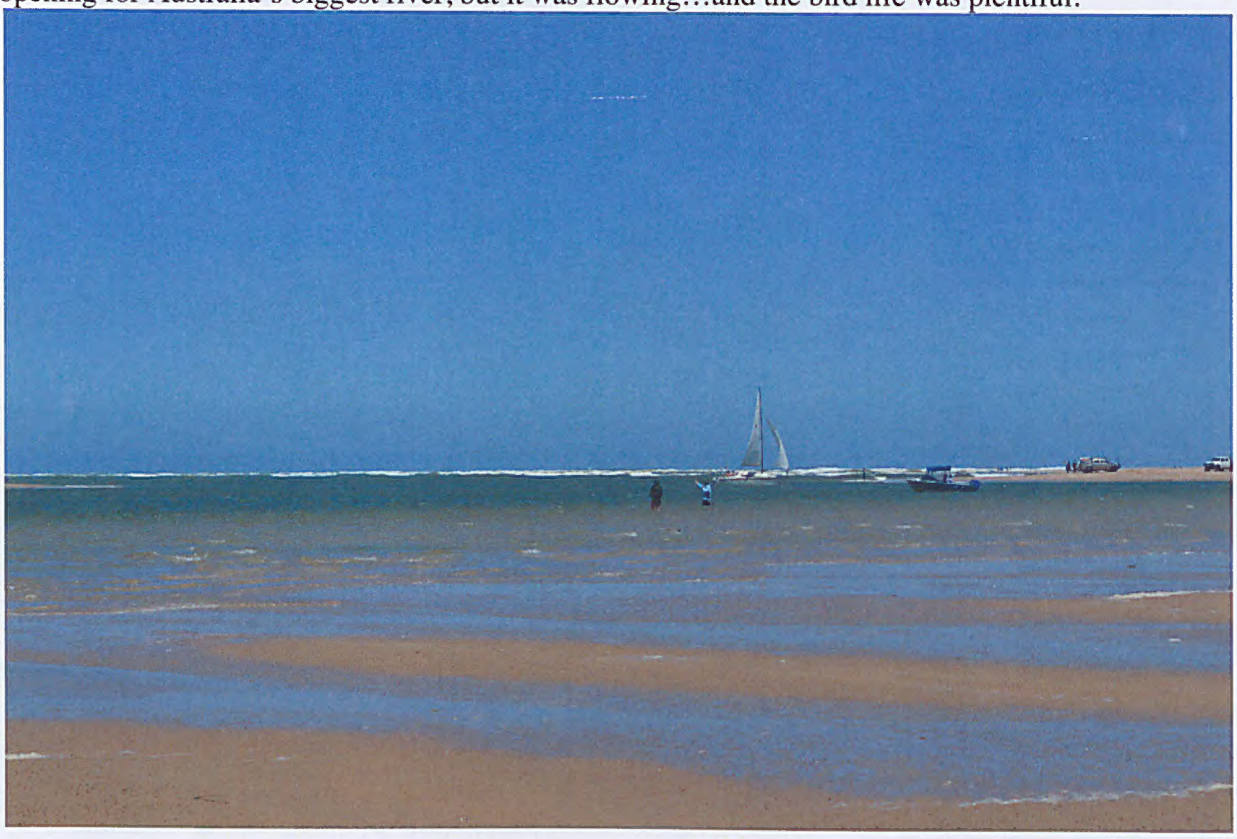
An unusual visitor to Kennington Reservoir

The Royal Spoonbill is an addition to Jan's observations already reported at the February meeting of the Common Spoonbill at Kennington Reservoir (see page 8)
The White Ibis is present there in larger numbers and much more common than either of the Spoonbill species - it's always special to see the Common Spoonbill here at Kennington Reservoir and very special to see the Royal Spoonbill (Photographer: Rod Orr, date 18th February)
There is a good width of mud surrounding the Reservoir as its water is drawn down and used on the sports ovals further downstream on Grassy Flat Creek. The aquatic life in the Reservoir is being concentrated in smaller areas of deep water and this is obviously very welcome to the visiting birdlife. Black-fronted Dotterels are also becoming more numerous on the expanding muddy flats around Kennington Reservoir.

From Peter Ellis' files… Peter took this picture at the Millwood Road site back in the late 60s or early 70s, Tom Patullo on the left, Ken Maes far right. You can see plenty of healthy (quandong) plants and there were definitely young plants as well. See article on p.8

Some summer photos of a wandering editor...

The mouth of the Murray at Goolwa, January 2013 (photographer Bruce Johnson). A narrow opening for Australia's biggest river, but it was flowing…and the bird life was plentiful.



Leaf litter in a forest near Capel, Western Australia. The cones are from *Banksia grandis*

The interesting, finely layered bark of the Snottygobble (*Persoonia longifolia*)

...February Observations from page 3

This month, Rod and I have seen flocks of 20+ Little Black Cormorants 'system fishing'. They all face the same direction and dive together and then bob up to the surface as a group. The muddy water conceals what they do while submerged but seen from the bank it looks very impressive.

Other birds we have seen frequently are:

Nankeen Night Heron, a White-neck Heron, a Large White Egret, Coots, Dusky Moor-hens, Purple Swamp-hens, Australian Little Grebes, Masked Lapwings, Black Fronted Dotterels, Black Ducks, Chestnut Teals, Maned Geese, Swans, White Ibis.

This week we saw a pair of Common Yellow-billed Spoonbills and a pair of Pink-eared ducks. Both these species appeared unsettled by the joggers and walkers using the foot path and were seen on one morning only.

Rod also saw, albeit very briefly, a water-rat in the holding pond at Beischer oval.

This is an interesting shallow pond as there is a substantial reed bed growing in the channel between Cousins St and the pond. I have briefly glimpsed furtive rail/crake-type birds skulking along the muddy edges.

Mud is marvelous isn't it?

Glenise & Rob Moors

6th February: Stopped to pick up a road-kill Tuan on Nankervis Rd - this was a young male in good condition.

13th February: Found a Moth/Butterfly on Creeping Mistletoe at ~6pm. It was walking around slowly, sliding its hind-wings up & down. The larger fore-wings were held upright together. (For photo & ID see page 5)

Simon Hay

At the 'Hole in one' lake opposite APCO in Kangaroo Flat a single Water-rat was seen on several occasions between 1 & 3 am on the dam's spillway & dashing back into the creek when it saw me & my dog, Sparki.

Joy Clusker

Saw 2 Wedge-tailed Eagles at Pieper's Hill, Strathfieldsaye (Tuesday 12th Feb).

Jane Cleary

There are numerous small Skinks in the garden at Epsom at present together with one Large Striped Skink (*Ctenotus robustus*) - on Feb 14th.

In early Feb, a flotilla of Black Cormorants worked its way around Lake Weeroona. They dived in unison, those at the back surfacing first & flying to the front of the group. Perhaps they had been unsuccessful in catching any prey.

In January, on the hottest day, large numbers of Tortoises were basking with their heads out, between the cycle track & the island at Lake Weeroona.

Thoughts about quandong regeneration

By Peter Ellis

On Matt's Whipstick-Kamarooka excursion for SEANNA last year, we were looking at several very old quandongs and discussing the fact there were no young plants or seedlings coming on. Yet I recalled there are, or were, plenty of young plants amongst the roadside quandong grove on Millwood Rd on the right not far after the turn you would take left if heading for Hartland's or the Loeser Rd turnoff (see historic photo on page 6)

Recently I was perusing a bird magazine while staying at my sister Glenda's at Baranduda. There was an article on Western Australia flora and fauna and it was mentioned that quandongs need to pass through the gut of an emu to enable germination. This is a different region of course, but I wondered whether that might be a local factor; emus were once in this area but were presumably eliminated following the gold rush and farm settlement etc.

Glenda also pointed out that another factor that could come into play for quandong germination could be fire and treatment of the kernels with smoke or smoked water.

Be interesting if any further ideas on this relating to regeneration in the Kamarooka Forest could come forward; the long drought might have been another factor, but certainly quandongs are grown at Goldfields Revegetation Nursery, so Matt could perhaps comment on any special procedure they use.

Conclusion on Whipstick excursion and Ruedin's distillery (see February *Whirrakee*)

by John Lindner

During the course of the excursion, Noel provided the following interesting and slightly offbeat snippet about his father. In the 1960s, Frank Robbins began his very detailed survey of the Whipstick, beginning with the very area, which included the Ruedin's eucalyptus distillery.

Everywhere I went there seemed to be animal tracks – the only way animals like wallabies would have of getting through such dense and interesting scrub. For the less venturesome human beings who must have a track to walk on, the map shows tracks accessible by car and by walking. If you come in or out by way of tracks on blocks 12, 13 and 14, you will not be chased out by the owner, provided you behave yourself. He is a flower lover like us. (The Bendigo Naturalist, Volume 1, Number 3, April 1968, page 8).

Presumably this is how Frank met up with Leon.

I would like the indulgence of offering a few thoughts of my own on an era that has now vanished, but which still casts its spell if you let it.

The "old field naturalists" that I knew soon after I came to Bendigo in 1979 were a very interesting group. They included Leon Ruedin, Bob Allen, Frank Robbins, Jack Ipsen, Jack Kellam, Tom Patullo and Reg Smart. I daresay Leon is the one I have been focussing on during the course of the search for the big mallee fowl mound and the story of the distillery. Reg Smart is still going strong at 100 years of age. (And by the way, they all had strong, determined, "in the background" wives who supported their activities – but that's another pretty interesting story in itself). Incidentally, I am in no way trying to set them up as saints on pedestals. They did have their individual peculiarities – that's a nice way of saying they could be stubborn, bloody-minded and difficult at times.

With a new field naturalist mind that was as blank and pure as the proverbial driven snow, I learnt many things while rubbing shoulders with these people. My knowledge was soon being filled in like a 1000 piece jigsaw, with the bits flying in at random from all directions.

But I did not just learn facts about plants and animals, which I desperately craved like a starving man. I also learnt something about a certain attitude to knowledge and its acquisition which even now, 30 years later, I find hard to define and somewhat mysterious. What was it about these men that made them so engaging well into old age? Few of them had more than a basic formal education, but all had worked for long years in a variety of trades.

Frank Robbins was the notable exception – he was a teacher at Bendigo High School, and was a true blue academic, ah, but with some quite endearing idiosyncrasies. In the early days they had no access to the huge variety of references that we take for granted nowadays. For example, they would send plant specimens to the herbarium in Melbourne for identification. The deep and intimate knowledge they had of flora and fauna had been acquired with great effort over many years.

Why and how and does it matter? The "answer" that I have arrived at, and which I first hit on with reference to Jack Ipsen, is that these men had maintained their intellectual vigour well into old age. They worked hard at that task – it didn't just happen accidentally. For them the world of nature was an endlessly intriguing thing, a vast field which held their attention right to the end of life. They could still maintain a genuine boyish attention and enthusiasm for the natural world. They held onto something which was endlessly inspiring and regenerating. And what they did was definitely not mainstream, part of the general culture. They were quite ordinary men to look at, but inside they were extraordinary, each in his own way. That is what Leon had in common with Jack Ipsen – an indomitable spirit, and a twinkle in the eye to go with it.

Isn't that inspiration worth understanding and replicating? We still have those kinds of people in our club by the way, both men and women, and in my opinion it is what underlies the enduring quality of our group.

BFNC Lake Eppalock – Campaspe River Excursion

Location: Coliban and Metcalfe Pools, Lake Eppalock and about 5.0 km up the Campaspe River from the lake

Date: Sunday 24 March, meet 8.30 at clubrooms

Organiser: John Lindner, telephone 5448 3406, email jwl.bendigo@gmail.com

Reserving your place: Due to the difficulty in getting small boats, there is only space at the moment for 11 people, 3 of whom are the boat skippers. Expressions of interest at the February meeting were in excess of this. Therefore, to secure a place, please notify me by email. Places will be allocated in order of notification. I apologise for this stricture.

Subject matter: This excursion mixes pastoral history, building ruins, geology, plants (both exotic and indigenous), water-birds and mammals. It has something for everybody, but is a long day.

Modes of travel: Boating (small power boats) with some walking.

Please bring: Note: each person must wear a proper life jacket, sourced by himself/herself. Full cover-up clothing and protective gear to prevent sunburn on the water, sandshoes for the water part, boots or strong shoes for the walking part, morning and afternoon tea, lunch, water if you don't think you can drink the river water, bathers and towel for swimming, camera, binoculars, day-pack for gear you need on the walk, water bottle for the walk.

Excursion notes and map:
An outline of each location will be available.

Car travel details: Bendigo, Strathfieldsaye, Eppalock Kiosk, Twin Rivers Road, turn right at the T-junction into Ryans Road, turn left into Hazlett Avenue, turn right down to public launch ramp at 0.5 km. About 38.0 km one way. The boat trip starts from and returns to this location.

Cost: Car pooling will minimize the number of cars. Passengers should contribute $5 -10 towards car fuel costs and $3 towards boat fuel costs.

Boating details:
Total return distance is about 18.0 km.

Walking details: The walk loop from where the river enters the lake is about 4.0 km. However it is up and down (some quite steep pinches), and includes rough ground, a dry creek crossing, 2 shallow wades across the Campaspe and long, dry grass. Must have good boots and preferably long pants.

Attractions The following locations are visited as we travel up the river:

1. Ruins of "Flower Hill", Westblade, 1862 – 1886 approx. Major site with many features.
2. Large anticline in Ordovician sediments in the river bank.
3. Hut and garden ruins, George Wood, early 20th century.
4. Vertically dipping Ordovican strata, cross-section and bedding plane views – various places.
5. Running river water meets the lake, rocky section with River Bottlebrush. We can go no further than this on the water. Probable lunch site.

The following sites can only be accessed on the cross-country walk, about 4.0 km return

6. Gold mine shafts, Taafe brothers
7. Ruins of the "The Pines" homestead, Duncan McLennan
8. Stone cottage, Henry Jasper, 1868
9. Basalt block ford in the bed of the Campaspe River
10. Basalt stock yards, Gibbard's Lane (2.0 km return walk from the ford)

Other notable features of this area:

Evidence of the huge floods of early 2011
Many large old River Red Gums and Yellow Box
Black Wallabies - small population along the river
Inverted relief created by basalt filling ancient river valleys and subsequent erosion
Various waterbirds.

Please note: There is an excursion planned for April 13 (Mammals of the Box-Ironbark Forest, Leader Kerrie Norris, destination Rosalind Park and No 7 Reservoir) but there was no room for the details. Please check next month's *Whirrakee*.

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday March 13 7.30pm
Dr. Rohan Clarke, Lecturer, School of Biological Sciences, Monash University, will talk about 'Tropical birds, pathogens & the joys of fieldwork in Torres Strait'

Excursions

March 24 Lake Eppalock – Campaspe River. Leader: John Lindner. See page 10 for details

April 13 Mammals of the Box-Ironbark Forest. Leader: Kerrie Norris. Destination: Rosalind Park and No. 7 Reservoir. More details in the April *Whirrakee*

Regular Fauna Excursions

Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Family Nature Club

The next activity is on Sunday 17 March and involves visiting an artist in his studio. Please check with Clare Needham at the Bendigo Art Gallery if there are still places available.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Fungimap Conference

May 24 – 27, see page 3 for details

Positions Vacant

The BFNC is still looking for an enthusiastic member who can take on, or help with responsibilities of the club garden. A minute taker for our general meetings is also still needed.
Please phone Jan Orr with any expressions of interest for both positions.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

All welcome to the SEANA Autumn Camp

The Peninsula Field Naturalists Club (www.home.vicnet.au/~penfnc) will host the event from the 15th March to Sunday 17th March 2013.
The accommodation is Merricks Lodge (UCA Camp), 108 guests,
3670 Frankston Flinders Rd, Merricks 3916.
Melways Page 17 Map 192 or Map192 B12.

e-mail address: penfieldnats@gmail.com
postal address:
Ms. Doris Weigert, Peninsula FNC Inc.,
Unit 3, 2 Skinner Street. Hastings Vic 3915.

2013 Connecting Country Education Program. Connecting Country's 2013 Education Program has the theme 'learning from experience & learning from each other'. It is a diverse and interesting program and that is enjoyable, inspiring and, of course, educational. Check it out at:
http://connectingcountry.org.au/12/the-connecting-country-education-program-is-on-again/